



An aerial view of a new middle school under construction in southwestern Orange County. It will relieve crowding at Bridgewater Middle School in Horizon West, which has nearly 1,600 more students than it was built to accommodate. The new school is to open in August. (Courtesy of the Orange County school district)

In the past 15 years, the Orange County school district has built 50 new schools, and it plans to build 14 more in the next five -- all to handle increasing student enrollment. Three of those new campuses are expected to be ready for students in August, all in the fast-growing Horizon West community.

There is so much residential growth in that section of Orange that the district is now building so-called relief schools for schools that were built to relieve crowding on other campuses not so many years ago.

Advertisement





ADVERTISEMENT

Population surges south of Orlando and in the Lake Nona area have prompted school construction, too. And a voter-approved sales tax — given the OK in 2002 and again in 2014 — has provided money for the district to renovate or replace more than 100 old schools, spurring campus construction projects across the county.

But building new schools because existing ones are packed with students is most prevalent in a swath of southwestern Orange where Horizon West has sprung from former citrus groves.

“This is one of the fastest-growing areas of the country,” said Pam Gould, the Orange County School Board member whose district includes Horizon West. “It’s crazy. It’s absolutely crazy.”

Here’s a by-the-numbers look at what’s happening, based on school district data.

## **4 percent and 52 percent**

Percentage of county land that Horizon West takes up — and percentage of 2017 Orange residential building permits filed for Horizon West homes, according to Orange County government figures. That explains why schools in that community are filling so quickly.



A home under construction in Horizon West in 2006. (Julie Fletcher/Orlando Sentinel)

## 23 and 13

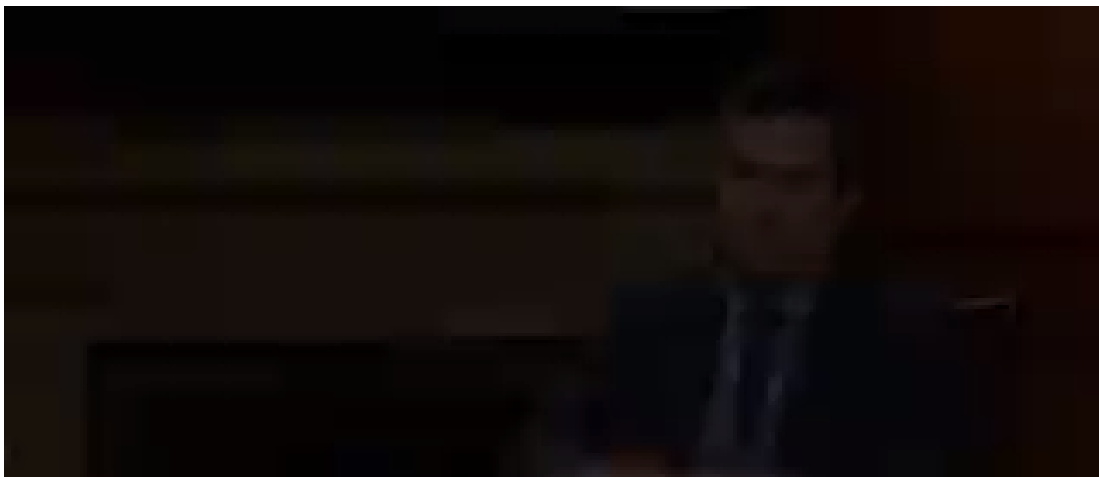
The number of new schools to be built under the district's 10-year capital plan — and the number on that planned construction list to be built in southwestern Orange from now through 2028.

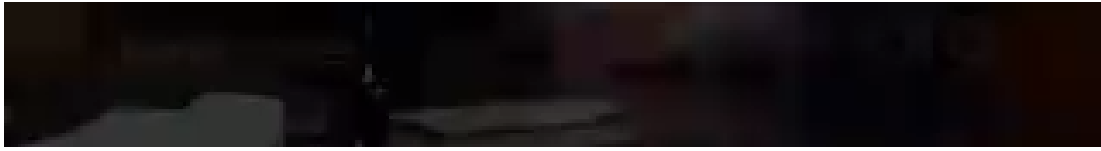
## 2,620

The December student enrollment at Bridgewater Middle School in Horizon West, which is the most crowded of the district's 196 traditional schools. Bridgewater, which opened in 2007 to provide relief for then-crowded Lakeview Middle School, now has nearly 1,600 more students than its campus was built to accommodate. Horizon West is “just a lovely place to be,” Gould said, but rapid growth always strains public services, including schools.

“It’s challenging,” she said. “You can’t build far enough ahead.”

Advertisement





## 90

Number of portable buildings at Bridgewater, used to help house all the extra students on a campus designed for 1,040. Bridgewater has more portables than any other Orange public school.

## \$83.5 million

The budget for the new middle school that will relieve crowding at Bridgewater, plus two other new elementary schools in Horizon West. That new middle school, under construction on Tarrant Road, and the new elementary schools all are to open in August. The new elementary schools aim to reduce crowding at other nearby campuses, including Keene's Crossing and Independence elementary schools.



Independence Elementary school, which opened in 2015 in Horizon West (Courtesy of Orange County school district)

## 2015

The year Independence Elementary opened as a relief school. It now has 500 more students than it was built for — and needs relief of its own. The new relief school (it doesn't have a name yet) is under construction on Water Springs Boulevard.

## 1,511

The December student enrollment at Keene's Crossing, which opened as a relief school in 2009, and has a campus meant for 800. It will also get help when that new campus opens this summer. But because so many people are moving into the area, the new school that opens in August 2019 is expected to fill quickly — so it is slated to get relief when yet another new Horizon West school opens in August 2020.

## **40 and 33**

The number of portable classrooms at Keene's Crossing and Independence elementary schools, respectively.

## **2,173**

Number of portable classrooms in use at Orange public schools through the end of 2017. That's down from 3,400 in 2009, a decline that's happened even as enrollment has climbed.

ADVERTISEMENT

## **211,484**

Total student population in Orange public schools in mid-December.

## **174,867**

## Total student population in Orange public schools in December 2009



Courtyard banners at Freedom High School, which has an enrollment that tops 3,900. It is to get relief when a new high school opens in 2022. (Leslie Postal/Orlando Sentinel)

two largest high schools. By the time the new school is to open, enrollment projections show both high schools will be educating more than 4,100 teenagers each, with Freedom at nearly 4,400. Freedom's campus, off south Orange Blossom Trail, was built for 2,600 students.

### 4,028

The projected student enrollment at Windermere High School by 2022. Orange's newest high school opened in 2017 as a relief school for West Orange High School. But it is getting crowded so the other new high school to open in 2022 — one to be built in Horizon West — will be its relief school. Windermere High's enrollment is now more than 3,300 students on a campus meant for 2,750.



Windermere High School, which opened in 2017, is getting crowded already. A new high school, to be built in Horizon West, is expected to help when it opens in 2022. (Ricard Ramirez Buxeda/Orlando Sentinel)

### 2022

The year the Orange school district plans to open two new high schools. Both schools will be built in southwest Orange. The one off Turkey Lake Road is designed to reduce crowding at Dr. Phillips and Freedom high schools, both of which now have more than 3,800 students, making them Orange's

### 1,176

The current enrollment at Sun Blaze Elementary School near fast-growing Lake Nona. The elementary school, opened in 2013 as a relief school, is now 400 students over capacity and will get relief when a new elementary

school opens in 2020. Another new school to open in 2023 will provide relief to two other getting-crowded elementary schools in the Lake Nona area.

## 118

The number of old Orange campuses that have been replaced by new schools or renovated since 2003. Seven more redone schools are to open their doors in August.

## \$617 million

The cost of school construction projects budgeted by the Orange school district for this fiscal year.

### LATEST EDUCATION

---

Florida senator files bill to make day after Halloween a school holiday: report

3h

---

UCF VP Grant Heston, who worked under former presidents Hitt and Whittaker, is out

JAN 3, 2020

---

After Bryce Gowdy's suicide, let's elevate the conversation about poverty's effects on youth | Commentary

JAN 3, 2020

*postal@orlandosentinel.com 407-420-5273*

[»](#)